

Why I am a Spinster


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WHY I AM A SPINSTER

BY A TEACHER

When I was a young child, everyone got married. To be sure, that was a long time ago; but it is nevertheless true that everyone, so far as my small observation went, got married. All the uncles and aunts, and there were many on both sides of the house,—all, without a single exception, went or were led to the altar; indeed, some few, who were so unfortunate as to lose their partners by death, went, or were led thither a second time, just as soon as the conventionalities of society would allow them to repair the loss. So it was natural that my sister and I should regard marriage as the natural lot of all, as we did. When small, we played house under the trees, and derived untold pleasure from the broken bits of china which served for dishes, from which our large family of dolls was fed. Looking back now to this remote period, I cannot see that the husband played any part. It was the housekeeping and the care of the children that engrossed our attention. To prepare the meals from bits of cake or bread, to pretend that one or more dolls were ill, was an unfailing interest, and when the girl next door, the only playmate allowed outside of the family, introduced “Stoolie Johnny” as an addition to our little circle, delight was unbounded; though, to be perfectly truthful, I think it was the tiny spot of hardened glue upon the under surface of this small wooden stool that won its instant recognition in society; that and the appealing way in which the four legs stuck out when it was placed on end. To our childish fancy, it seemed asking to be held, and it was seldom without a nurse. To be sure, the legs had an uncomfortable habit of striking one in the eye, if one turned suddenly, but this was a small matter. As for the spot of glue, it was, in turn, a vaccination mark, an indication of scarlet fever, measles, or small-pox, though this latter malady was received on faith, as it were, from our neighbor who claimed to have once passed a house bearing the placard of this dread disease. Up to this time, we had been carefully excluded from the society of boys, our baby brother being still young enough to be classed as a girl. Our enlargement of view came in the shape of a party, given by

my father's partner in honor of his little Arabella's birthday. I, as eldest daughter of the house, was invited. I had never seen my hostess or her home, but mother's preparations indicated a high festival, and interest grew accordingly. The evening before this important function, my flaxen poll was well washed, and when nearly dry, divided off into little squares, each of which was rolled and twisted on that instrument of torture known to a prehistoric age as curl paper. Hitherto, this ceremony had been reserved for Saturday evening, which probably accounted for my attaching a religious significance to the occasion. My grandmother, as high priestess at these times, did her work well, and even now, I can recall with a shudder, the restless Saturday nights spent in a forest of twisted papers, and the Sunday mornings, when slipping early out of bed, I used to examine with curious satisfaction, the pink scalp rendered bare in tiny strips, which a childish fancy likened unto streets, and then shut my eyes tightly, to feel the strain upon the poor little front hairs more acutely. But to resume, the present occasion was no exception from its fellows, and after a further reminder of Saturday night, in the form of a warm bath, I retired to spend the usual restless hours. As the books say, "I awoke in the morning unrefreshed," and being set apart to high office, took little notice of usual occupations, nor was there much time. My hostess lived at the other end of the town, and it was my father's pleasure to leave me there upon his return to business, after the noonday meal. The distance was considerable. This and his probable consideration saved me from the mortification of being too early, for which I am even now thankful. At the proper time, I was again washed, and arrayed in my best frock, a new crimson poplin that scratched tender skin unmercifully, the curl papers being left in until the last possible moment. The limitations of sex being thus duly acknowledged, we departed for the unknown Mecca. It was a pretty house surrounded by vines, with a lovely veranda in front, like our old home in New York. I loved it at once. The hostess was not visible, but her mother was more than kind, and I was soon ushered into the parlor where the "party" was in full swing. This was my first introduction to the genus boy. He stood, in what seemed to me large numbers, behind chairs ranged in a long line down the center of the room. At this moment, they were playing the classic game of "clap in—clap out." I was sent to the hall, whence—I soon heard my name called. Choosing the wrong seat, I was promptly ejected by the young fiend back of me, who with a deft movement of the chair, sent me sprawling to the floor, amid howls of delight and clappings of hands from the

assembled multitude. I found, of course, that this rough treatment was all in fun, and that one was expected to be agile enough to escape it. But this knowledge came later, and being much frightened and a little hurt, I retired to the window seat, whence I soon learned the ethics of the game, without experiencing any desire to return to it, however.

The next venture was something called a "teeter;" a number of barrels lay on their sides in the garden, and over each a long board was placed. A boy and a girl immediately took possession of each, but out of consideration for my battered condition and general incompetence, a long, lank girl of twelve was asked to be my partner. Mrs. Brown superintended us herself, carefully putting me on my end of the board. Margaret, as she was called, came down with an awful thud, at the first to go off, and I shot into the air like thistle down, striking my unlucky nose on the sharp edge of the barrel in the descent. My nose wouldn't stop bleeding for a long while, so I spent the remaining time before supper in miserable seclusion, only emerging at Mrs. Brown's suggestion, to be escorted by a boy to the table. A severe headache causing this foreign custom to appear trivial, I was enabled to take my partner's arm with composure, and Mrs. Brown smiled kindly, under the evident impression that I was improving. Father exhibited much concern upon seeing the disfigured nose, which he feared was broken; and the family showed real grief upon my return. I have since learned that this feature was the only point of resemblance to either parent which I possessed. It was, therefore, considered somewhat in the light of an heirloom, like old china or a silver tea pot. But grandmother, who was a strict churchwoman of the old school took occasion to point a moral. Long before, she had told me never to play at "see-saw," and now this horrible game was the same, it seemed, a fact I now recalled, though it had not been thought of in the confusion attending my debut. But so it was, and the devout kinswoman doubted not that the swollen nose was a direct punishment for disobedience. "I had," she asserted, "behaved in an unseemly manner," and brought disgrace upon my "ancestors." This last clause was quite familiar. We heard it often, and failing to grasp its full meaning, applied it variously. Just now it represented a very sore nose, and I was as sorry as any one could wish.

The next public appearance was a school exhibition. It occurred on a raw March morning. I remember the earliest breakfast I had ever eaten, and the walk down the windy street. The bare school room with its little wooden seats painted light green struck me, even then, as comfortless, a

feeling not yet entirely outgrown; and I can still smell the newly scrubbed floor. Grandmother, herself the product of an "English school for young ladies," sought to cultivate our manners after her own pattern, and in accordance with this plan, Elizabeth and I had been taught an elaborate curtesy. Before leaving home I had been reminded of this ceremony, and it kept coming to mind all the way down the street, at intervals, and even after we had entered the building, and were on our way down the narrow aisle. At the end of the room, upon a sort of raised platform, sat a man with very black hair and swarthy skin.

"That's the principal," said Helen, in a whisper. If she had said "That's the executioner," it would have meant exactly the same to me. He looked very black, and seemed to be paring his nails with a pen knife. The affection and respect always shown my father, coupled with my own natural stupidity, are perhaps responsible for the fact that I always looked upon man as a superior being, a state of mind to which I even now revert occasionally. This, and the injunction raised before leaving home, are probably responsible for the curtesy, as I took my seat beside Helen.

"Catholic!" snickered a boy across the aisle.

"I'm not!" I retorted, hotly, though I had not the slightest idea what he meant.

"Hush, you musn't talk," said my hostess, while the man on the platform tapped a bell.

"Not talk!" How absurd! But I held my tongue bravely, amid the amused giggles of my neighbors.

Later experience has led to the conclusion that some sort of examination in geography had been planned for this morning, which explained the presence of the principal, but I was untrammelled by any such knowledge, and sat up, keenly interested in everything going on. The examination, if such it was, proceeded somewhat in this fashion:—

"What is a river?" An unintelligible murmur from the pupil addressed.

"Next!"

"Yum-yum-yum," from the other side of the room.

"Wrong! Who can tell me what a river is?" The awful black eyes seemed to be looking at me, and with an egotism born of terror, I shouted,

"I can't."

"Hush, you musn't talk!" said my hostess in real distress, while all eyes centered on my corner.

"How does it run?" pursued the tormentor on the platform.

"Run indeed!" thought I, "our old river at home never did such a thing!"

"Up or down?" continued the voice.

A girl stood up and said something; how I envied her poise, evidently she was not afraid. Another stood, but not with such good results; next a boy answered some remark, then—

"East or West?" came again.

"Yes, sir," I shouted, in desperation. A scene of merriment followed.

"He wasn't asking you," said poor Helen, while a girl behind us administered a sharp blow on my back, and a boy opposite made an awful face.

"Nobody spoke to you," vouchsafed another, evidently a friend of my hostess.

"He did too," retorted I, indignantly. "He's looking at me all the time!" which was probably true.

"Who?" whispered some one near me.

"That man up there."

I grieve to say that this seemed to break up the exercise. Shortly after, a young woman whom I had considered of no importance, but who was evidently the regular teacher, approached my desk, and I was led out and dressed for the street. I remember feeling very tired, and thinking that I would never go to a place like that again. Thus ended my first morning in school.

For a long time, after this, I seemed to be regarded as an undesirable guest. At least, nobody invited me to any function, and we led our peaceful life in the little garden totally undisturbed until one afternoon, when a lady approached the front porch. The next door neighbor seemed quite impressed.

"You don't know who that is," said she.

"Who?" asked Lizbeth.

"The lady from the Mission Sunday School, and she's going to ask your mother for you. She was to our house last week."

Sure enough, in a few moments old Ellen beckoned to us, and leaving our visitor standing in the pathway, we hurried in.

"You and Lizbeth are always so untidy!" ejaculated the much tried maid, as she smoothed my hair hastily." "Alfred's the boy to keep clean!"

It's a fact that our young brother never looked soiled. "And him a boy!" as Ellen would say admiringly. I have thought since that he was too plump to be very active, but be this as it may, he stood there clean and smiling, a marked contrast to his restless, homely sisters.

"What a beautiful boy!" was the visitor's salutation, as we entered the parlor. We were used to this. Almost every stranger made this remark, sometimes adding,

"What a pity the little girls are not so pretty as the boy." But on this occasion, we were spared this compliment.

Alfred gave his usual seraphic smile which resulted in an invitation to sit on the teacher's lap, a courtesy he accepted with his usual composure, while Lizbeth and I stood unnoticed near the door, our customary experience. My sister generally made a face at the visitor when this stage in the proceedings was reached. We always told each other we did not care; Lizbeth often adding that she was glad she was homely. It is probable, however, that this was not quite true, as upon one occasion she fell upon Alfred after the visitor's departure, and bit him sharply on the thumb. But these reversions to savagery are common to us all.

The "Mission Lady" was quite smiling and pretty. She asked if I could read.

"Oh yes," said my mother, "show Miss Ketchum your Natural Philosophy, Mary." As a scientist's daughter, I began the study of physics at six. The book was brought with a nonchalant air. The teacher looked at me as a sort of unpleasant curiosity, as least so I felt, and so Lizbeth said later. We felt intuitively that she did not care for plain little girls—and this in spite of our youth.

Mother parried the invitation. Father was in New York, and she knew he was opposed to indiscriminate teaching. Then, too, the school would undoubtedly have its quota of boys, and we were segregated from boys on principle.

How it was managed we never knew, but the diplomat left with a promise that we should attend next Sunday.

"And be sure to bring little brother," was her parting injunction to me.

"Does she want you?" called my neighbor, from her post on the gate.

"She said we must come Sunday."

"Will your mother let you?"

"I don't know."

"May be we don't want to," from Lizbeth.

"I'll call for you 'cause you don't know the way." The school was less than a block from us, and in plain sight. "My new hat's come home. I'll wear it Sunday!" as though she was conferring a favor.

Sunday was a day of excitement. Long before the time for starting, we were ready to the last thread. Lizbeth wore the pink satin bonnet the girls all envied, and Alfred his new plaid kilt with brass buttons. In spite of temporary aberrations, we were both very proud of his appearance, and his beaver hat with its standing feathers was certainly regarded as a family treasure.

"Hold your brother by the hand, girls," was the parting injunction, as we marched down the street three abreast, our gaudy neighbor leading the way.

The building was large and square, painted brown, with many large windows, and a long white board over the door, with the legend, "Fifth Ward Union School."

Two men, like officers in plain clothes, stood near the door. One held a book and a pencil.

"What is your name, little girl?"

"Mary Amelia M——."

"And your sister's?"

"Elizabeth Emma M——."

"And the little boy's?"

"Alfred Thomas ——,"

"Well, well, one name's enough," responded the scribe, not unkindly, "And where do you live?"

The address was given.

"And your father's name?"

I answered.

"And what does he do?"

This was a poser. Lizbeth's usually fertile mind was blank, but a thought seized me. Father had mentioned, at different times a number of things in connection with his business, and conceiving these to be what he meant, I began—

"First he does one thing, then another, and then another, and another," checking off each item, as I remembered it, with a little nod. It is probable that I might have continued the enumeration until now, had not the questioner interrupted with—

"That'll do, little girl, that'll do—your father does a variety of things!"

The word being entirely new, and rather impressive, I accepted the amendment with favor, and we followed our guide into what was known later as the "infant room." Having learned our alphabet in the good old-fashioned way, Lizbeth and I looked with scorn at the devices here used week days in teaching a feeble minded race the a-b-c, but the little chairs pleased us, as did also a picture of a horse hanging over the teacher's desk; the engraving of Washington with the toothache on the other side of the room pained me as much then as it does now, though I did not then know why.

The teacher was very smiling and happy. She kissed Alfred affectionately, omitting the salute with his sisters, however, and we were assigned seats. It was conceded that, a student of the sciences, I should be placed in a higher class, but as we had been strictly commanded "to keep together," this was impossible, as Alfred had not yet acquired any educational

art. After some kind of singing, Miss Stevens read a Bible story. It was Samuel, a fact that would have been forgotten long ago, had not my childish ear caught her peculiar pronunciation of the word, "heareth." "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hairereth," was what she said. That finished her influence with me. Lizbeth, who was neither purist nor snob, said it did not matter, but I sniffed scornfully at the lesson. As for Alfred, he took his afternoon nap at the usual hour—on the teacher's lap. The fat legs dangled conspicuously in front of the whole room, and we felt the disgrace keenly, Lizbeth and I. It made no difference to Alfred, but we dreaded the time when he should wake up, for though a sweet-tempered boy, our brother could, upon occasion, howl louder than any child I ever knew, and the occasion generally attended the moment of waking. This afternoon proved no exception. After nodding like a beautiful rosy poppy for a long time, Alfred showed signs of waking, when all of a sudden, without any warning his tremendous bellow burst upon the air. Every one started except his sisters, and business was suspended. We felt the shame keenly, but a cooky appearing upon the scene miraculously, the noise stopped as suddenly as it began, and the end was reached without further interruption.

The journey home was fraught with speculation, and though so short took a long time. Never had heaven or the angels been brought so near, or made so familiar. It seemed almost indelicate not to say immodest. Hitherto, they had belonged in the big Bible on the parlor table, never condescending to meddle in private life. As for Samuel, was he not a dear little figure with flowing curls, as he knelt with hands clasped in prayer? Often had we flattened our noses on Mother McLogan's store window, to behold him as he dwelt thus on her mantel. Evidently, he too had joined the company of familiar ones. It was all very strange—like the instructors! Lizbeth, who was an idealist, asked me if I thought teachers ate meals. At this moment, Alfred, who had been gazing at the leaden sky for some seconds, broke into the familiar howl. Urged to state the cause of his grief, he cried still louder, until a smart rap from Lizbeth restored him to sanity, and enabled him to explain that he didn't want to go to heaven, as there was nothing to sit down upon, from which we have since inferred that Miss Ketchum's urgent invitation to prepare for that blessed abode had not been received in the proper spirit.

Of course, Sunday School was now the first interest in life and a constant topic of conversation. All our games were made to conform to its supposed requirements, and the dolls led a religious life which rivaled any order I have since known

in point of attendance upon divine worship. Each Sunday found us early in our place, and Alfred took his nap regularly under the conditions first decided upon, always receiving a cake upon awaking, in lieu of the tickets his less favored sisters earned in a different way. This continued about four weeks, I think, and was beginning to lose some of its novelty when my father returned. Whether he had been informed of the Sunday School episode, I cannot say, but think he had. However, it was closed forever in less than a week after his return, and for the following reason:

There was in the class a long, lank boy of about ten. Anything more unkempt or wretched than he, is difficult to imagine. Pity and curiosity first drew my attention to him. At least I think this is so. The maternal instinct latent in every girl was roused in this instance, I feel sure, though Lizbeth, who is much brighter than I, and more observing, claims that under certain limitations, a state of "unwashedness" has its attractions, citing in proof that our schoolmates with a penchant for soiled collars and necks married earlier than more careful and less approachable confrères. My little niece, aged four, holds the same view apparently. Discussing one day the good points of her little sweetheart, she exclaimed enthusiastically: "He is so pretty, and his nails is so dutty (dirty)." But whatever the cause, this forlorn and neglected specimen just mentioned was the first boy I smiled upon. His state of mind was not divulged, as we never spoke, preferring possibly the language of the eye. Up to this time we had never seen him except on Sunday. Where he lived and how, are still profound secrets. But this fateful Monday morning he came strolling past our door and I saw him! To behold this favored youth on a week day was a boon hitherto unthought of, and with a delighted grin, I opened the gate, when a tap on the window arrested me. My father had called me in. He was a man of few words.

"Who is that boy?"

"I—I don't know."

"Where does he come from?"

"I don't know."

Father looked puzzled. "Is my little girl telling me the truth?"

"Yes sir." I could look my father in the face, for it was all true.

"Where did you first see him?"

"In Sunday School."

That settled the matter. We never went again. The teacher called more than once, but the episode was closed.

It may be that some one reading these words will think this

treatment too severe; but it must be remembered that differing conditions produce differing ideals. The daughters of European homes in father's time experienced a seclusion unknown to women in America to-day. He loved his children deeply, but the idea of segregation, though modified, remained with him to the end.

We had few toys in our childhood, but this only increased our resourcefulness and ability to enjoy simple things. To lie on one's back and watch the clouds chase one another across the sky was a source of unfailing interest, and when, at sunset, they clothed themselves in tints of pink and gold to attend the departing sun, they seemed to point the way to a beautiful country, perhaps it was heaven, a beautiful country where it was always day, and to which I should some time travel, a fancy that stays with me yet.

They say that heaven is nearest to us in our youth; the same is true of this world. Everything is ours; it is not fancy, only, that sees a face in every blossom and endows the creatures around us with the power of speech. We love all things; and love gives understanding. The hop vine on the porch was a thing of indescribable beauty; and an old-fashioned clove pink sparkling with dew can even now bring back the day when the earth was mine "and the fulness thereof"—when ambition and courage rose high, and effort knew no limitations.

I remember one morning long ago, when I was sent with a priceless offering to a sick friend of mother's. Nothing in my eyes could have been more beautiful. The day was yet early and I trod on air. No wealth, no rank could have added to my joy; and yet the passer-by saw, if he saw at all, only a plain little girl in cotton frock, bearing an immense bunch of dew-flecked morning glories. Such is childhood, and yet even these days are not cloudless; for love gives understanding, and now, if ever, we feel the suffering around us, and the crushed flower that gives a life for our momentary enjoyment, the little fish drawn gasping from the water, and the distracted bird bereft of its nest, all appeal to us in heart-rending grief. Let no man think lightly of a child's suffering in such scenes as these;—to do so only shows how far he has traveled.

Then too, fear plays an important part in these early years. Dread of the unknown, of lightning and of the dark are too common to need more than passing notice, but there are numberless other fancies that cause unspeakable suffering of which we learned adults never dream. The little pale face at breakfast says nothing of the terror stricken night; and her family dismiss the matter with,

"Jennie doesn't look well this morning," to which the stereotyped reply is,

"She'll feel better when she goes to school," which is quite true, because the night's picture fades in the interests and occupations of daylight, to return probably, the next bedtime.

My own childhood was no exception to the rule. At six, a huge spider, larger than any species known to man, used to watch me all night long. Its dreadful black eyes never left my face, and I dared not move lest it should jump upon the bed. This continued for months, perhaps longer, yet I never mentioned it but once, and that was one evening, when told to go to bed, I buried my face in father's coat and said something about the "big spider."

"There is no spider," said mother.

I nodded miserably.

"Let's see what she means," and both parents examined carefully the corner indicated, where, of course, nothing was found.

"It comes back," I sobbed.

Neither understood, but father told a fairy tale, in the midst of which I dropped off. I cannot recall whether the spider returned that night or not, but it certainly did later, and I can see the awful eyes looking at me now, and the dreadful body just ready to spring.

Later came the fear of volcanoes. This had its origin, probably in some tale of the family circle in which the destruction of Pompeii figured. At any rate I saw a mountain in state of eruption with the lava engulfing helpless people as distinctly as I saw my own home. This lasted a long time. Finally I asked Ellen if there were any volcanoes near us. She thought there was one in North Carolina. Why she thought so was not divulged. The next step was to locate this favored state and estimate its distance from us. This was finally done with mother's help, though she never knew why the question was asked. The dread of being buried alive was terrible and lasted a very long time. It was suggested, no doubt, by a picture of an earthquake found in an old geography brought down from the attic to "amuse the children." It possessed a horrible fascination for all of us. The luckless victims caught head downward in the fissures were terribly suggestive. Alfred and Lizbeth lingered longest over the mortals running to a place of safety, but they were too young to see the awful possibilities conjured up by me, and, as usual, father had to come to the rescue.

It is probable that all children suffer in this way, the fear of each being different, as suggested by each environment. But let me return to my narrative, which should now grow broader and relate more fully those facts which have to do with the conditions called for by the title of this sketch; for

the few experiences here set forth have been culled at random from our child life merely to give a setting for the picture which is to follow. They represent, fairly well, the condition of the secluded little girl of a half generation ago; I mean the little girl who had no brother to molest or intrude upon the seclusion thought proper for young females of that day. It is well that this representation should be made here, because it gives, as nothing else can, a partial reason for the conditions so deeply regretted by sociologists of the present time.

To continue then,—the time for expansion had come. Its first indication in our little town came in the removal of the front fence. Trivial as this may seem in itself, it changed our whole life. We no longer played in the garden, screened from all observation, and seeing no one save the children whom our parents approved. We had become cosmopolitan by one fell swoop of the workman's axe, and we were now citizens of the world. True, the garden was still our boundary, but we talked with every passing child and were in the public eye from morning till night. The effect of all this upon our little group may be judged from a chance remark of grandmother's, "How bold the children are getting since the fence has been taken away." And Ellen's reply,

"Yes'm and they gets their clothes so dirty."

And now the opportunity longed for by our parents presented itself in the shape of a select school for girls. Hitherto, indeed, our town had boasted of a seminary in which young ladies were "finished," but nothing for younger daughters had appeared, so this innovation was much appreciated.

I was installed the first morning with about thirty other young *dunces* in something called the primary department. The work seemed absurdly easy; but as my previous instruction had not classified according to the iron clad rules of the institution, I was obliged to accept conditions, which I did with much apparent indifference and a great deal of inward contempt.

My first teacher was a Southerner of gentle birth, a fact she tried to impress upon us by always wearing gloves. Never but once did we see her hand, beautifully white and small, and that was in the writing lesson, when the printed copies had not been brought. We all thought she must have been a great lady in her own country, so this artifice succeeded.

The policy of the school was as different from anything we have now as can be imagined. The one subject of importance was "deportment." To enter a room properly was better than to know fractions. Sometimes I have thought our teachers were right in this view, but this idea came later. I attended this school three terms, and then ran away. Nobody called

it truancy, but so it was, in effect. Looking rather pale one morning, father asked if I were tired. Replying in the affirmative, I was told to stay at home until I felt like returning. Construing this speech literally, I am still out. I never went back, not even for my books lest the little French professor, who watched us from his office, like a spider, should question me and then write to my father. I had other plans, and it was not until fifteen months later, fifteen happy months, that I again crossed the threshold of an institution of learning. Of course, I had studied, but it was the browsing, desultory way young folks love and from which they always get so much.

The only thing regretted in leaving the French school was the fortnightly reception held for the young ladies in the interest of "deportment." The professor in evening dress and white gloves was an impressive spectacle. Young gentlemen were bidden to these functions, and these were my first opportunities to meet boys of my own age, socially; and I fancy there were others in the same position. At the first of these occasions, I well remember wearing a pale pink frock, and as all my dresses at this time were made with low neck and short sleeves, I was certainly "*de rigueur*." The one sad thing about these delightful entertainments was the scarcity of "gentlemen," a paucity that troubles the hostess even yet. The first evening was no exception to this rule. Being still rather shy, this condition was, as yet, no hardship to me, but being asked later, to join a classmate and her "company" when refreshments were served, I ate my ice and sponge cake in the presence of a young military student and enjoyed the experience, becoming, after one or two of these functions, somewhat enamored of social life; though even this did not keep me in content. In the meantime we were growing up, a fact kept painfully in mind by certain friends of the family, who when visiting, invariably asked when "Mary" was going back to school, an attention I acknowledged later by walking away from their daughters when placed in the same classes. The matter was simple. I was not tired out and exhausted by an infancy spent in the senseless confinement of a school room. This explained the whole situation.

As before remarked, we were growing up, though still young enough to regret the new furniture that was brought to adorn the sitting room about this time. Indeed Lizbeth cried when the old gray rocker went up garret to make room for its handsome successor, and she was right, for the old chair had been, in turn, a house or a fortress, from which many an invading foe had been repulsed. The new was beautiful but nobody would ever think of converting it into cradle or castle. It meant nothing to us.

But a change greater than any yet experienced was awaiting us. An unfortunate business venture had swallowed father's small capital, and what was far worse, hampered him for some time to come. But this meant little to us, and when it was announced later that all of us would attend the neighboring public school, we regarded the whole matter in the nature of a lark!

We appeared the following Monday morning when classes were in session, and followed my father timidly, as he mounted the principal's rostrum. The room, as I learned later, held two hundred pupils, and we encountered a battery of eyes while awaiting the conference of our elders. Never in my life had I seen so many boys or dreamed that so many existed; but there they sat in solid phalanx on the south side of the building. One of these degenerates winked at us, when the teacher's attention was engaged, while another made a hideous grimace at Alfred. For a moment I feared this delightful courtesy would be acknowledged in the usual manner; but cosmopolitan experiences had already improved our brother, and he stood the ordeal with tolerable composure, until the brief arrangements were made and we were assigned to classes. I was so fortunate as to find a place in the principal's room; but Lizbeth went below stairs, while Alfred found his intellectual level in the basement. And now began my first real romance. I was at this time a slender delicate girl of fourteen; my admirer, Peter Graham, was a year older, rather stout, of the type too critical relatives are apt to call "common," but in my eyes he was perfect, and he escorted me home from school each afternoon, in spite of the thunderings of the rostrum, for our principal was evidently of the same mind as the average parent of his day, and regarded the innocent association of girls and boys as sinful. It is a fact we heard more upon this than any other single subject, more than ever was said about truth or honesty, though there was much need of this sort of teaching. Our principal was a good man—as principals go—and doubtless had his reasons for this line of conduct; but his severity only rendered a sort of deception easy. We, in common with everybody else, met our companions at the end of the square, and parted from them at the corner nearest home. Lizbeth was considered very fascinating, though fully two years younger than I. She interested easily any of my friends and even then gave indications of the social popularity that was to come later. As for Alfred, he maintained the even tenor of his way untrammelled by thought of conquest, only getting into trouble when led into it by some older boy. Although we never thought of inviting our companions to the house,

this was the most natural and joyous period of school life. For me it was cut short at the end of one short happy year by further financial difficulties which so crippled the family resources that it was decided that I should prepare for teaching. Let no one suppose I chose this sacred calling upon any principle of natural selection. I was, at this time, as ignorant and innocent a girl as could be found anywhere, and even after three years of severe application in a training school, was in much the same condition. But in our little town the only avenues open to women were teaching or sewing. I felt the position acutely. Like the unfortunate steward in the Bible, I could not dig, and to beg I was ashamed; so I prepared for teaching. There was no sentiment in this, not a particle; my only assets at this time were a great love of children and a strong desire to lessen the family burden; so it has since proved rather amusing to hear affectionate friends who ought to know better, declare fondly that "Mary is a born teacher who could never assent to any other occupation—a girl so devoted to her future art, that in early childhood she played school from morning till night." Of all this I can only disclaim any knowledge. True, we did play school quite frequently when small, but the game was imported, as it were, by the girl next door, and consisted of a sort of mauling process in which the entire enrollment, teacher included, often found itself on the floor engaged in a sort of scuffle which had its rise in an attempt to discipline; and such is the power of habit that even father, an unusually truthful man, frequently related this legend, when later years had mellowed the discrepancies.

But to resume the narrative:—

The time of training at length expired and my name was enrolled in the list of eligibles. I shall never forget my first appointment. It came late one Saturday evening, and was borne by a policeman in full uniform. Like the invitation of royalty, it "commanded" the person therein named to report for duty at B School the following Monday morning. B School was the building once so familiar to us, and every member of the family was sure the principal had asked for me, a very complimentary state of things in their estimation. But I was too happy to care, and escaping from the affectionate clamor, went out and stood beneath the old pear tree. The night was beautifully clear, and by degrees the moon's calming influence began to be felt. I walked slowly up and down for a long time, and before returning to the house, thanked Heaven for my success, and asked for help in my new undertaking. How Sunday passed I never knew,

but Monday found me early at my post. If our old principal found any pleasure at seeing his former pupil, he certainly exhibited marvelous self-control in concealing it. His wooden countenance betrayed absolutely no emotion as he answered my timid good morning with the familiar snort.

"You are assigned to room K in the basement. See that your clock is with the bell each morning, and ask 'Her,'" nodding in the direction of the next room, "for any help you need."

"Her" evidently meant the teacher in J, and she proved very kind and helpful. As for my principal, he never offered any more suggestions, contenting himself with walking through the room each morning, and watching me like a cat the rest of the day. Room K held fifty little girls who were learning to read. I worked hard, and finding that many could repeat the lessons "by heart," conceived the idea of reading them backward, a process invaluable as a check upon deceivers, though not mentioned by any training school. But I was a joyous soul in those days, and loved the walk to school each morning. The path lay across the green fields, partly under gnarled old apple trees that had once been an orchard. It was beautiful to see the pinkish blossoms overhead and to watch the birds building. The air too was delightful, and with the appetite of healthy youth, I often ate my noon-day lunch under those trees, only to repair the deficiency at noon with iron clad buns from the corner store. But trifles made little difference then. I loved my school, and it was a real grief at the end of the year to learn that I had "earned promotion." So it was that in June I left my peaceful little room, never to re-enter it from that day to this.

I was no longer a cadet! My first pay-day assumed the importance of a national holiday, and I still admire the fortitude with which our elders received my first purchases. They were too precious to be brought home in the usual way, and mother's pretty brown eyes opened wide as I placed in her hands an immense china tea-pot that matched nothing in the house, and was too frail for general use. She thanked me with affectionate tact, and Lizbeth's hair ribbon was a grand success. In the afternoon I took the children across the river to a certain little shop known far and wide for its oyster patties, after which, we walked out on the high bridge and watched the trains come and go beneath us; a pastime still indulged in.

If my first year afforded little time for social intercourse, the second proved still more strenuous. Indeed these Saturday jaunts came to be the most joyous feature of the week, looked forward to by us three, until the chance remark of a

parent who "felt sorry for the young widow with the b'y," happened to reach mother's ears and brought the practice to an end.

Yes, my cadetship was ended, and the real business of teaching before me. A noted writer once said that over every teacher's door should be printed the words, "Who enters here leaves hope behind," and he spoke truth. The recognized vocation of the religieuse cuts off its devotee from marriage and motherhood no more surely than that of the schoolroom, and it does it more honestly, for the nun knows her vocation is for life; the cadet enters in the belief that she may withdraw whenever she chooses, only to find that a few years in the classroom leave her too tired, too spiritless to try anything else. I am talking of conditions as they were with us in the Mississippi Valley not so many years ago. Perhaps they were different in other parts of the country; but with us, the teacher did not often marry. True, she did try it sometimes, but not as a rule after teaching any length of time. The shop girl walks home briskly after a day's work, but the teacher, even though she leaves earlier, plods along with measured step. Lizbeth caused a hearty laugh one day when our old minister asked if Mary had a "beau."

"She don't have time," announced my loyal defender, and she uttered a profound truth; for the social graces, like all other graces, need time and thought for their cultivation, neither of which is at the teacher's disposal. As for me, I worked early and late, teaching all day and correcting all night; or at least I was expected to do so, as no time was allowed in school for the 270 themes and papers I was to look over and discuss each week. Invitations there were in plenty, but I was too tired to accept, and upon the few occasions, when dressed and pushed out by the family, I ventured to attend some small function, I had no energy to render myself agreeable. As for dancing, it was a forgotten art! Loyal friends remonstrated, but not understanding the situation they finally mistook preoccupation and fatigue for indifference, and it began to be noised abroad that Mary was becoming a blue stocking. Was ever fate so cruel? For what young woman could overcome the effect of this social handicap? The average young man passed by on the other side; and he was quite right. It takes courage and a large heart to choose a companion as intelligent as oneself.

And yet, even in those days, fate did not forget me entirely. One afternoon the senior class in English was giving a play. Every one remembered his lines, for a wonder, and my office as prompter was rather a sinecure in consequence.

It was just before Christmas, and the auditorium was crowded with what the next morning's paper would call a "representative audience." So with an unusual sense of leisure I was standing back of the stage chatting with one and another, when a stranger interrupted to ask some questions about the new heating plant just installed. He looked like a well dressed successful merchant of about thirty-five or forty, and as I turned to answer him, said something about wishing to examine the heating system, "if it was not too late," so I called the janitor, and the occurrence was forgotten until some days later, when the assistant janitor, a bright young Irish woman came to my door, with—

"Sure, Miss Morrison, saving your presence, I think that Mr. Anderson has a pile of cheek, so he has!"

"Who is Mr. Anderson?"

"He has that big clothing store under the Opry House. He's a big man, and he comes here this mornin' at half-past-six."

"Did you tell the principal?"

"Sure an' I did not. He wants to know where you lives. Miss Morrison; an' it's a pile of cheek he has; at half-past-six!"

"Anderson, a merchant," thought I, unable to make any connection. There was a little Anderson in one of the primary rooms, and a Mrs. Anderson had once come to me when trying to find the principal; but why should the husband want to see me?

The question was answered later in the week when Mr. Anderson appeared one evening at my home. He indulged in no useless preamble—

"Do you know why I called, Miss Morrison?"

"I do not."

"Do you know why I came up to the school?"

"No."

"I have known you a long time by sight, Miss Morrison. You pass our store very often."

"Yes," said I vaguely.

"Don't you know why I came up to the school?"

"No."

"Can't you guess?"

"I cannot."

"I came to see you."

Silence.

"I came to see you."

No answer.

"You can do with me anything you choose. From the first moment I saw you I knew that you could make of me any-

thing you chose. Anything you want!" continued my visitor, with much more of the same sort.

I was so astonished that I felt perfectly calm, if this condition can be understood. I remember a wild thought of insanity darted through my brain; but I looked at the man with perfect composure. He was much excited; as he ought to be. My wits were slowly returning.

"Your little daughter attends our school, Mr. Anderson."

"She does."

"And Mrs. Anderson has visited us."

"Has she?"

"Then I cannot understand—" I began with rising temper; when my visitor interrupted with—

"Wait Miss Morrison, that's a tie that can be broken!"

His answer stunned me, but, absurd as it may seem, the full enormity of it did not come to me till the next day. I was ashamed to tell my elders; I knew what my father would do; at least I thought I knew. But I asked Lizbeth's advice. She was very indignant, but could suggest nothing, so we decided to tell nobody, and to avoid going near the store. Probably we should never see him again. But in this we were mistaken. Several weeks had passed, and I was beginning to feel quite care-free again, when an occurrence brought back all my restraint in a moment. I had stayed late one afternoon to finish some papers and it was almost dusk as I stepped into the dressing room for my wraps, when glancing at the street below, I saw Mr. Anderson standing beneath the portico, so near to the wall that one coming from the building would not see him until fairly out on the walk. A sort of senseless terror seized me; yet why should I be afraid? The janitors were both in the building, and if it came to the worst, I could ask one of them to walk home with me. So I waited until they were ready to go, and then stepped out with them. No one was in sight, and I hastened home, running nearly all the way. Lizbeth was very much frightened and for the remainder of the winter, I never came out of the building alone. But all my precautions were needless. We never saw Mr. Anderson again.

Then there was the handsome widower, old enough to be my father, who told me with tears, that his late wife had bidden him make me her successor, "after a proper time had passed." She had been dead three weeks when he brought her message, and the old gentleman seemed quite impressed with his consideration. He offered me all his money, and behaved in quite a large hearted way; making several generous promises that I had not the courage to accept.

The young electrician who lived near was magnanimously

given to me, also, though I never spoke to him in my life. He drowned himself, and I can well recall the dreary visit of condolence Lizbeth and I made the next day. We were received by his married sister, a fine, handsome woman, whom I had met once before. Wishing to say something sympathetic, I remarked,

"It must have been a dreadful shock, Mrs. Williams, almost as great as if it had been your husband." To which the lady responded with great fervor,

"Worse—much worse! You can get another husband, but not another brother!" She then asked who our minister was, and ended with,

"I'll send for him. Robert would wish it. He hoped so much to know you, some time—oh so much! He tried so hard to meet you, but you never called; and we have lived here two years!" This painful visit came to a close at length. After the funeral, our minister called to ask why he had been chosen to officiate. Fortunately mother was the only one who saw him, and she did not know.

The young divinity student was originally a classmate of Lizbeth's who fell into the habit of accompanying me home from prayer meeting. We lived about two hundred feet from the church, and the road was very dark and lonely. Nelson made a fairly good salesman, and was in the way of promotion, when he took a notion to study for the church. I was disgusted; even Lizbeth, much broader than I, was shocked that a man with so little talent should aspire so high. But he went to college and after four or five years, received a "call" to a far western parish, where he stayed until about three years ago, when he died, leaving a wife and baby. He was not considered a gifted preacher, exactly; and there are still people in our native town who say,

"What a shame he thought so much of that Mary Morrison. No wonder his life was spoiled!" So evidently, I am held responsible for all those poor sermons. Isn't that awful?

Looking back now, these experiences seem like a dream. It is almost impossible to realize how true and real they once were. It is a mercy that time blurs the sharp outlines of our earlier years. Still I was not unhappy. Though so fond of society, I loved my work, and in it found that sort of contentment that always follows a sense, whether true or false, of duty performed. That it was a duty, I fully believed, for we were caught in the birth throes of the "new education," and the development of woman was the battle cry. To be intelligent, to have a mission, was urged upon us in season and out of season. Pulpits grew oratorical on the subject, and journals held forth in dry, lengthy columns upon the

duty of sacrifice to some good for the race. One wretch, who deserved hanging, wrote in a prominent school journal that any woman who did her duty in the class room, could not, and should not expect to maintain health for a period longer than five years, and this outrageous statement went unrebuked. Be it remembered, however, that it was the woman who was urged to make this sacrifice, never the man! Marriage was rather frowned upon by these high priests of the new cult; never to be thought of except under the most ideal conditions. Only the perfect man was to be taken, and not even the perfect man if the girl had a vocation. The neighbor who taught with me, and whose devout mother had been caught by the clatter, was urged to pray for a mission, but declined, fearing, as she confessed to me, that her prayer might be answered. I shared her fear. My whole soul cried out for the frivolities of youth, and no Israelite longed for the flesh pots of Egypt more strongly than we for the bright garments and gay company that belong to youth.

But though not desirous of a vocation, I loved my school, and prayed for wisdom in its undertaking. In it I was contented and happy for the present. At this time life stretched before me, an unending road that wound through verdant fields and sunny plains. This road was always bright, and at one turning I always saw, with clear vision, a home and children that were mine. I knew just how they looked, and how I should dress them. My husband was noble in every aspect of character, and I was blest. With this future before me, I could afford to spend a few of the uncounted years in the care of the young people whom I always loved. So we worked and played together, as many another school has done. So the days passed. An occasional suitor came—and went. Lizbeth married, in time, and then Alfred, little Alfred! They said I was too particular, and perhaps this is true; for everything has its season, as I have found; and, as Mrs. Poyser said,

“One loses his appetite for dinner, if he waits too long.”

So I am a spinster, and shall probably remain so till the end of time; unless—unless Peter should return. For no one can stay the hand of fate; and what is written is written!